WHITE BLUFF

757 824 "Duh wite root," pointing to a wild shrub, "dey use fuh stomach troubles. Buttuh root an palmettuh root an May apple, yuh bile tuhgedduh wid a quawt uh watuh till it simmuh down tuh haf uh pint, den yuh add some cawn wisky. Dat a fambly tonic tuh buil yuh up."

777 [784] Sophie went on to tell us something about the beliefs prevailing in the neighborhood. "Ef some relative is sick, yuh dohn nebuh deah tuh sew on a gahment wut yuh is weahin cuz dat put a spell on duh sick un an dey mos liable tuh die.[43] Deah's anudduh ting too. Yuh sho bettuh not steal tings frum a grabe.[44] I sho know I wouldn. Deah's jis a lot uh udduh tings bout bad luck too. One sho sign is dat [827] ef a pusson sneeze wile dey's eatin long, dat is, dey hab food in dey mout, den dey got tuh put it out lessn dey hab bad [825] luck.[42] Anudduh sign is duh hootin ub a owl."[44]

754 A strange look of doubt and amusement came into Sophie's eyes at the mention of conjuring. She smiled and slowly shook her head.

"I heahd ub a few cases weah dey say one uh duh neighbuhs cunjuh anudduh,[18] but fuh duh mos paht dey all gits long all right. Das cuz we's all Christians an dohn put no faith much in dem kine uh tings. Dey say dat a powuhful chahm kin be made frum grabeyahd dut[9] fuh cunjuhin puhposes, but duh pusson dat git duh dut mus put some pennies on duh grabe, else he hab trouble hissef. Nebuh let a enemy git any ub yuh haiah wut bin cut off aw yuh nail clippins. Ef he git deze he kin make sumpm dat will cause [826] lot uh trouble.[10] I kin tell yuh sumpm else bout duh haiah [825] too. Ef a bud gits duh haiah, yuh'll hab a headache soon.

754 759 "Now Uncle John Bowen on St. Catherines he wuz a root man an one time a man come tuh him tuh git somebody fix. Uncle John he wuz fixin tings tuh linguh um, an duh man sit on duh cheah weah he hab duh cunjuh tings an Uncle John he git so mad he git right up an fix duh cunjuh right now so dat man wut awduh duh fixin die hesef. He fix lot

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

The main roadways branch into dozens of dirt roads angling around bends, across creeks, and through narrow passageways before leading to small communities. As remote as some homes are, many are large, fully equipped, and constructed of brick or wood with aluminum siding. These homes reflect modernization, improved education, and the rise of a younger, more affluent island society. Yet nestled amid these relatively expensive new homes are ancient, two-roomed houses, gray and weather-beaten but standing firm on the wooden blocks that have supported them for as much as a century and a half. These houses are called "shanties" by the islanders and are most often occupied by the oldest members of the community. Because islanders believe that the human breath is the primary factor in preserving a dwelling place, even a young family will sometimes prefer living in a shanty which has been recently occupied to living in a newer, larger home which has been vacated for a long time. Most shanties are kept neat and orderly—a remarkable housekeeping achievement, because as many as ten people may occupy one of these tiny older homes.

In addition to the modern homes and the shanties, trailer homes are common on the Sea Islands, especially on islands with no bridges connecting them to the coast. The trailer homes are convenient and economical. They generally come fully equipped with modern conveniences, and they can be easily dismantled, loaded onto a barge, and floated to an island.

Many of the older and some of the newer island homes are built to share a common yard area, which is kept free of grass and litter and is swept as part of the daily care. Maintaining a communal dirt yard was once routine for black families in the South, and it is also traditional in most West African villages. Even members of some of the most affluent African families, with expensive eight-bedroom homes, magnificent by any standard, keep the yard area completely free of grass by morning and afternoon sweepings. This smooth yard is functional on the Sea Islands as well as in Africa: keeping it grassless helps to eliminate insects and provides a clean, unlittered surface where children can play and elders can congregate to smoke, talk, and drink palm wine. This communal yard was the primary place where I was taken both on the Sea Islands and in Africa to listen to folktales and singing.

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

Spirits lift their feet high off the ground when they walk. If they come around your bed when you are sick and stay for some time, it means you are going to get well. The spirits belong to your dead relatives, who have come back to earth to see how you are. If they come and then go away again, it means that they have come for you and you are going to die.

Spirits come back to the earth sometimes in the shape of animals. They do this because they are evil spirits and want to worry humans. It is easy to tell whether a dog or cat that crosses your path is a natural animal or spirit. If it is a natural animal you won't feel anything, but if it is a spirit, the hair will stand up on your head and the goose bumps will rise on your skin.[b,c]

To prevent a dead person's spirit from returning to "Hant you," sprinkle turpentine on the floor behind the body as it is taken out of the house. The turpentine carries the spirit with it.

To keep "hants" (evil spirits) off when there is a death, burn sulphur at the four corners of the house.

If a person who has voodooed another looks in the face of the corpse when he is in his coffin, blood will gush from the mouth of the corpse and everyone present will know who "fixed" him and caused his death.

There are certain persons among the Gullah Negroes who are known as "conjurers," these are very dangerous people and not to be trifled with. A conjurer can "put bad mout" on people or things, give them bad luck and keep them from prospering. A "spell" cast by a conjurer can cause a person to become ill and slowly waste away until he dies.

A conjurer is a very secret thing. Negroes will not discuss it with a white person. It is black magic and to treat it lightly is to invite disaster. They will admit quite readily however, if they have had a particularly bad run of luck, that somebody has "put bad mount" on them.[c]

Negroes of the South Carolina Sea Islands seldom employ the word "witch" in describing an old woman who is versed in the art of witchcraft. Accurately speaking there are no witches among the Negroes—at

10: Johnson S-4,5 (no date) 1930
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

757 brown pea liquor as a wash for smallpox, a mixture of lard and mocking-bird bush (cassena) as an ointment for smallpox, soot for cuts, and lemon juice and ashes for colds.

757 One woman reproved a member of the research staff
755 because he threw away two rats which had been killed in
a trap. She said that the rats were just the thing she
[825 needed for a tea which she wanted to brew for her ten-year-old son to cure him of bed-wetting. The same
[826 woman believed that her failure to "bind" the boy—that is, to wrap cloth tightly around his abdomen—while he was a baby had resulted in his being weak physically. An-
[827 other woman believed that if a stammering child drank water from a bell he would be cured.

854 Many mothers with babes in arms will call the baby's
774 spirit when they start home after a visit, believing that the spirit might stay behind and evil consequences ensue un-
[777 less it is called. It is considered bad luck to let a baby
764 be near the coffin at a funeral. If one is present he is passed
789 over the coffin from one person to another in order to prevent his spirit from accompanying the dead. Mr.
854 Wildy, teacher of blacksmithing at Penn School and a
774 member of the quartet, said that on one occasion his in-
789 fant was taken to a funeral. He had thought nothing of the superstition, but other people at the funeral became very much disturbed on seeing the baby and would give him no peace until he had passed the child across the coffin.

764 As elsewhere in the South, the St. Helena people put
[171 on the grave the things last used by a person. These are usually china, glasses, pitchers, medicine bottles, and other inexpensive things, but sometimes articles of value are left on the graves—antique clocks, vases, and the like.